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Knowledge-Action Integration Through The Media in Indigenous Communities in Ecuador

Javier Herrán ^a*, V. Luis de Nicolás ^b, Pablo Vidueira ^b^a Universidad Politécnica Salesiana, El Vecino, Cuenca, Ecuador^b Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Ave. Puerta de Hierro, 2, Madrid 28040, Spain

Abstract

The binomial knowledge/action understood under the biunivocal relationship of both components is the basis of planning from a postmodern approach. Within this binomial, social communication gives appropriate information, nurtures the knowledge that leads to transformative action, promotes participation and enhances the community's self-esteem and recognition; to deeply reflect on action is a source of new knowledge; and communication fosters the adoption of the new knowledge by the community with new actions that feed the process knowledge/action as a planning source. From this approach the project Radio Message is born as a new communication channel with the aim of offering Andean indigenous communities from the area of Cayambe (Ecuador), a series of multidisciplinary training programs that enable transformative action with a strong effect on the life quality in these communities and their importance as social actors. The contents are designed through participatory communication between the training authorities and the communities themselves, analyzing their opportunities and needs. In this research the impact of social media in the development of more than 100 indigenous communities in Cayambe is analyzed.

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1. Introduction

Traditionally in modern planning, the State assumes the main role of both thought and action without an open process of communication with the population (Cazorla et al., 2004). This dissatisfaction prompted Friedmann to investigate alternatives based on social experience with the aim of gradually transforming society according to the life design of the local population (Cazorla et al., 2013). Faced with this modernity crisis, new planning techniques tried connecting thought with action. Some authors such as Llano have argued that within the action concept, the

* Javier Herrán. Tel.: +593 7-286-2213

E-mail address: jherran@ups.edu.ec

explanation for the failure of the modernist and scientist planning models can be found. Based on this argument, participation as the logic of collective action was born (Cernea, 1985) to create the conditions that allow people getting involved in the project, which is the basis of social learning (Friedmann, 1987). In this interrelationship process between institutional actors and the affected population, knowledge applied in the next action of the project is built. This knowledge is achieved as social learning amongst different actors, and builds the basis for a non-Euclidean planning model (Cazorla et al, 2013). This model involves a process of ongoing thinking on the dynamic knowledge / action, which makes planning a science other than engineering and projective anticipation that describes the technical reason of the modern project. On the other hand, communication has other roles in rural areas besides acting as link between knowledge and action. Communication is critical in the origin and progress of social processes (Quintana, 1984) and should develop in a strategic and comprehensive manner. The lack of meaningful communication is a key obstacle for decision making, which prevents sensitizing and mobilizing the people to freely participate in the development of their community (Vachon, 2001). Furthermore, the lack of information creates unknown opportunities (Cuadrado, 1992) and the feeling of remoteness and isolation (Smailes et al., 2002). All this has led to the depopulation of rural areas worldwide. In areas less populated, information transmission is more complex, therefore its negative effects get magnified (Comins et al., 2002). From this perspective, the media does not find its value on the amount of information it conveys, neither on its professionalism, but on how it incorporates the participation of the recipients in the communication process and on how it relates to the social processes that people have had to live through (UNICEF, 2006). Therefore, communication for development is defined as a planned strategic process, based on the evidence that is used to promote positive social and behavioral changes (UNICEF, 2006). This is what will be analyzed in the Radio Message case study carried out in Cayambe, Ecuador.

2. Context

2.1. Social context

The presence of the Salesians in Cayambe begins in 1949, with a Catholic school that P. Carlos Izurieta sdb was in charge of building. In 1964 the Agrarian and Colonization Reform Ecuador was set. In the heat of this long and no transformer agrarian reform process, public and private institutions involved in rural areas dealing with production, health, education and infrastructure began to appear. Radio Mensaje was established on November 23, 1967 in Tabacundo to promote the development of indigenous and peasant communities of the northern areas of the province. Thus hereby was created this means in order to enable first the community's literacy and then their organization. In 1979 Ecuador returned to democracy. Later human development projects were created in order to strengthen the development of the rural population in the areas of: health, education, agricultural production, infrastructure and microfinance. It is in this 80s context that Radio Mensaje, together with the International Center for Advanced Studies in Communication for Latin America (CIESPAL) and Radio Nederland (Cabezas and Rosario, 1980) changed its ways. Since then, the traditional schemes of informing, entertaining and educating suffered a complete turn over. Some stations, such as Radio Mensaje, became radios for development. In 1985 with the creation of the Casa Campesina of Cayambe and especially after 1987, following the earthquake that ravaged part of the region, Radio Mensaje became the voice of change and development in the area.

2.2. Territorial context

The Project “Área de Desarrollo Rural (ADR) Cayambe” defines the territory in which the Project Radio Mensaje is applied. The ADR Cayambe is composed of the following communities: Olmedo, Ayora from canton Cayambe, and Tupigachi from canton Pedro Moncayo. This area is 80 Km north of Quito (Capital of Ecuador). The ADR population is found in the foothills and central areas of the eastern and central mountain chains of the Ecuadorian Andes. The lower parts have an altitude of 2,800 meters while the upper parts range from 2,900 to 4,200 m. In this area there are two general climates: the temperate climate dominating the valley sector and which is characterized by having temperatures between 12 and 15°C, a relative humidity ranging between 75 and 85% and a well-marked rainfall distribution, that therefore influences positively the agricultural production industry; and the altitude climate found from 3000 m up, characterized by fluctuating temperatures between 9 and 11 ° C. a relative

humidity of 80% and a cloudiness between 5/8 and 7/8, which makes possible the development of animal husbandry, as well as high crop farming. In the influence area of the project, 22000 hectares are intended for agricultural production and are in hands of small farmers or indigenous families. The area with moorlands, streams, and some forests exceeds 30000 hectares. Most livestock production is milk, obtained by hand and grazing on the site. There are areas where there is a higher milk production and dairy products are developed; an example is Olmedo, where a special aptitude for dairy farming has developed, with a daily output of about 20000 liters. However, the technical conditions of production are deficient. Population data from the 5th Census indicate that within the development area there is a population close to 18,000 inhabitants. 60% of the population is under the age of 20 years and 37% are adults from 20 to 60 years old. The area of influence of Radio Mensaje covers 102 communities with an indigenous population of 50,500 inhabitants. The following figure shows the study area.

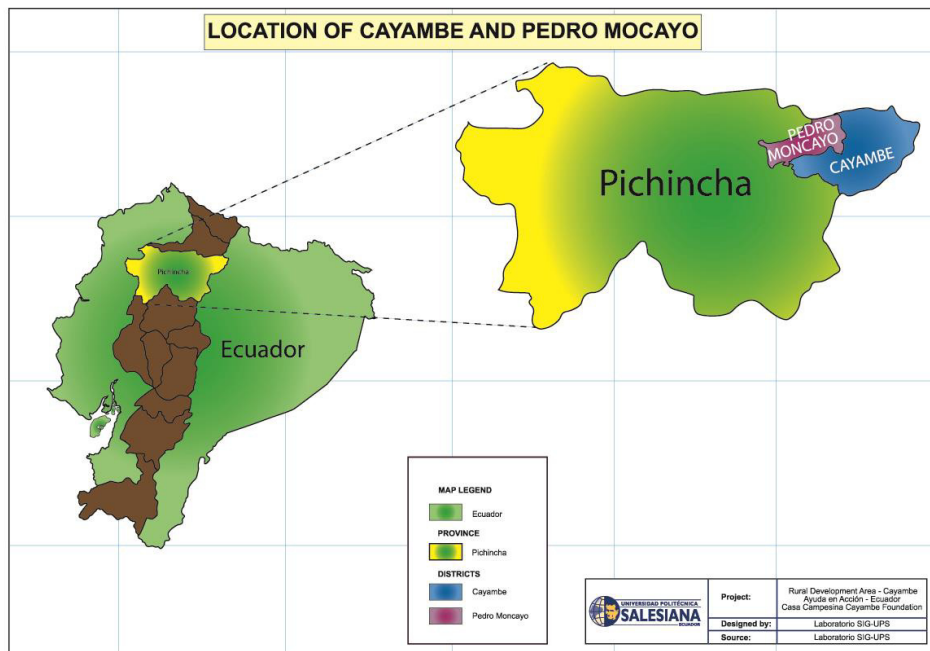


Fig. 1. Study area

3. Metodology

The methodology of this research is based on existing documentation and literature reviews on the Radio Mensaje project, as well as on conducting interviews. During the year 2013 a team of researchers from the Salesian University and the Technical University of Madrid made a documentation analysis on the activities Radio Message held, its results, relevant studies, evaluations and planning. Simultaneously they conducted interviews with actors involved in the project to ensure correct interpretation of the available secondary information as well as generating new primary information. To carry out the interviews and because of the difficulty of finding a population that constitutes a perfect sample, the snow ball model was used (Illemburger et al, 2012). The focus of this research is qualitative, since the definition of relevant indicators to measure social impact levels is controversial impeding numerous studies reaching a conclusion (Launay, 2008).

4. Results

The integration of knowledge / action through communication in the development of indigenous communities in Ecuador is the response adopted to solve the problems arising from the prevailing modern top-down planning. A response based on the respect for the Andean culture, the indigenous leader's confidence, the social awareness of the technical team and on the social learning of all those involved, is what is now called development communication. The new popular style of communication, which took a leading role in the years after the American dictatorships, was created in popular radios. However, the experience of sharing the same territory and recipients between popular radios and Integrated Development Project, as occurred in the Ecuadorian countryside, allow analyzing the synergies between the two, in favor of the development of the territory. The communication for development that has taken place since the Radio Mensaje project can be described from three key areas:

4.1. Participatory Communication

Development, as a transformation of reality achieving a better life quality for the population, requires a participatory process of the population affected by poverty to intervene in decisions that create change. The poor must be involved in the planning and execution of the development projects that affect them (Cabezas and Rosario, 1980). Communication for Development creates horizontal communication techniques, closer to the population and less technological. The message is created from dialogue with the people. Figure 2 shows the three main knowledge sources that communicate through Radio Mensaje for the promotion of the transforming action on communities' development.

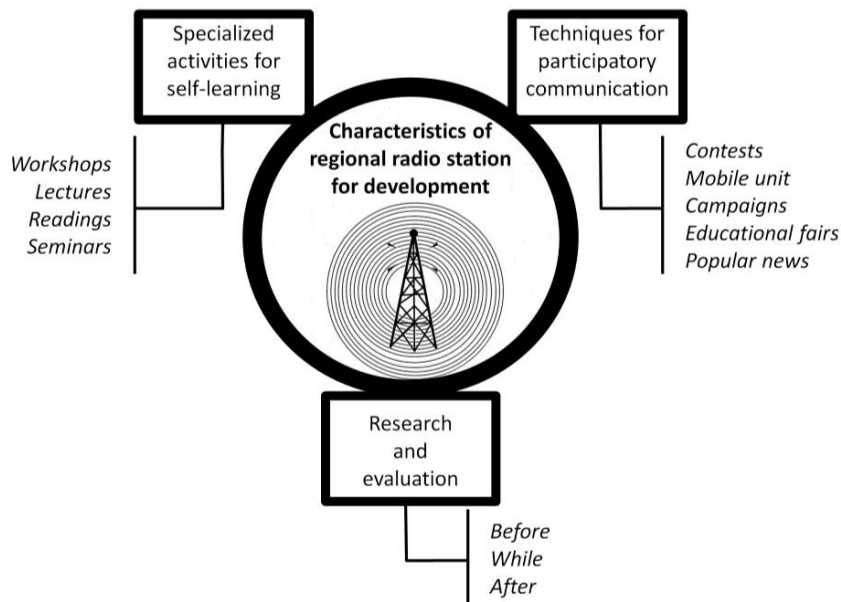


Fig. 2. Knowledge promotion through radio mensaje

4.2. The communicator for development

The communicator defines the objectives of communication considering the needs of the communities; their historical, geographical, political, economic and social circumstances. Besides communicating, the communicator is a development mentor and promoter, which means that whoever exercises this role, must have certain sensitivity as

described by Cazorla (2006). Some key aspects of this sensitivity are: respect for the person as the subject of the communication process, responsibility of self-performed actions in and out of practice, awareness of the indigenous communities situation and empathy for their way of life, critical capacity for analyzing the possible events that have some significance for the region, realism to report truthfully, creativity to introduce content and painstaking work to achieve real participation of the community, and the promotion of endogenous development of the communities. For everything that has been described above, closeness and contact between the broadcasting station and the community is crucial. Figure 3 show the different signals and degrees of contact with the audience from different types of radio broadcasting stations.

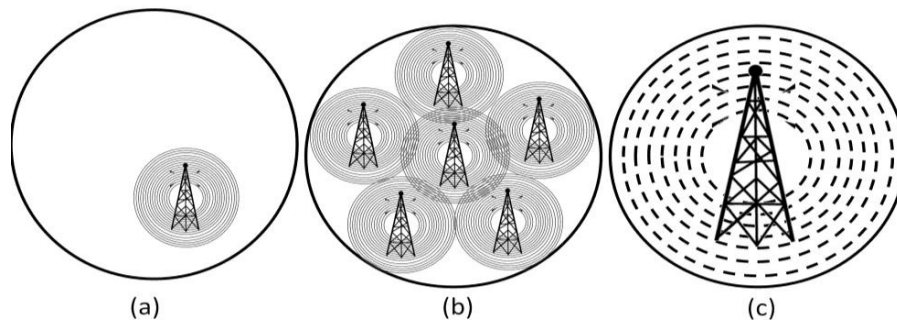


Fig. 3. Different signals and degrees of contact with the audience from different types of radio broadcasting stations
(a) regional station: small signal, great contact with audience (b) regional federation stations: great signal, great contact with audience. (c) national signal: great signal, not much contact with audience.

4.3. Knowledge building

The process of knowledge building through communication for development is even nowadays the problematization methodology (Cabezas and Rosario, 1980). The science of communication discovers reality as it is, identifying its key points, theorizing the organizing; and is offered as cognitive data that allow creating opinion and generating solution hypothesis to be applied to reality. Communication for development aims to study the development action that generates knowledge, but making it available for the understanding and interpreting of the population. This generates acceptance or enriched questioning thus fueling the construction of a bottom-up development planning process. In the communication process and even more when the objective is local development, the methodology used assumes that all knowledge is generated in a particular action and that all knowledge is validated from another determined action (Cabezas and Rosario, 1980). Therefore, Communication for Development focuses on a "generating - action". For Cabezas & Rosario (1980) the "generating - action" is a communication fact with the following characteristics: (1) ability to trigger a participatory communication process, (2) tends to produce changes that reproduce those features that within a renewed framework, are distinctive of the new society to be constructed, (3) tends to produce a revitalization in popular organization for rural areas exploitation, according to their development needs, (4) acts as a trigger factor of other social processes, driven by popular organizations, (5) becomes the "core" which requires an ongoing process of thinking about the proposed development daily activities. In fact, any social communication program builds knowledge in some way (Cabezas and Rosario, 1980). It is not possible to construct a "passive" recipient of the message, however, this message does stimulate, through knowledge and feelings, the values and/or anti-values of the recipient, through a positive and constructive critical attitude which creates a new reality in acceptance and conformity with the present reality.

5. Conclusiones

Radio Mensaje, as communication's generating action of the integrated rural development project's agents of Cayambe, has promoted social learning in the planning of such projects. The result of this learning process between communities and project planners is to create a knowledge that will be added to the action. On the other hand, the experience gained by the action developed, generates new knowledge that is then transmitted back through Radio Mensaje. Therefore, Radio Message has been and is a clear example of the two-way relationship between knowledge-action and a facilitator of the said binomial in line with the social, territorial and economic context in

which Radio Message has been developed. This approach to non-Euclidean planning based on social learning and the binomial knowledge-action, along with primary care and integration of the context components in which projects are developed, is in line with the planning approach "Working with People "developed by Cazorla et al. (2013).

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